

Executive – 9 March 2016

Present: Councillor Williams (Chairman)
Councillors Beale, Berry, Habgood, Mrs Herbert, Parrish and
Mrs Warmington

Officers: Shirlene Adam (Director – Operations), James Barrah (Director – Housing and Communities), Lucy Clothier (Housing Accountant), Jo Humble (Housing Development and Enabling Manager), Tim Child (Asset Manager), Simon Lewis (Assistant Director – Housing and Community), Angela Summers (Housing and Community Project Lead), Christine Gale (Strategy Officer) and Richard Bryant (Democratic Services Manager)

Also present: Councillors Aldridge and Coles
Anne Elder, Chairman of the Standards Advisory Committee

(The meeting commenced at 6.15 pm.)

11. Apology

Councillor Edwards.

12. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Executive held on 4 February 2016, copies of which had been circulated, were taken as read and were signed.

13. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Mrs Herbert declared a personal interest as an employee of the Department of Work and Pensions. Councillor Beale declared personal interests as a Board Member and Director of Tone FM and as a Governor of the South West Ambulance NHS Trust. Councillor Edwards declared a personal interest as the Chairman of Governors of Queens College. Councillor Parrish declared a personal interest as the District Councils' representative on the Somerset Pensions Committee.

14. Housing Revenue Account Business Plan Review

Considered report previously circulated, which sought to update Members on the progress of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Business Plan Review

The Business Plan contained the aims and objectives for the HRA and was first put in place in 2012. Annual reviews had since been reported to Members and tenants.

Since its introduction, there had been a number of significant changes to the Business Plan, both internal to the Council, and external. A comprehensive review

was now needed to ensure that the HRA continued to meet the needs of tenants within the financial constraints.

The Business Plan Review included:-

- Refreshing and reviewing the baseline financial position, including a health check of the stock investment data;
- Undertaking sensitivity and stress testing of the Business Plan to support the modelling of future decision making in areas such as rent policy, the major works programme, the housing development pipeline and regeneration projects, changes in Government Policy and demographic changes ahead;
- Reviewing the Business Plan priorities and objectives;
- Updating the Business Plan document, financial modelling and debt profiling;
- The development of a new Asset Management Plan to set a refreshed course based on the performance of the Council's existing stock; and
- A Development Strategy that would provide the future direction for new build volumes set against the regeneration of our non-traditional stock.

Noted that the company Savills had been appointed to provide external support and challenge for this work. The intention was for the Business Plan Review to refresh the priorities of the HRA and financial position over a new 30 year period – from 2016/2017 through to 2045/2046.

Further reported that a discussion paper prepared by Savills, in conjunction with officers, had been circulated with the report for the information of Councillors.

The paper contained details of the updated financial position, performance against the Business Plan priorities, and proposals for new objectives and an updated action plan. It also included five key areas of discussion as follows:-

- (1) What should be the core business of the Housing Service, and were the priorities in the draft action plan appropriate to deliver this?
- (2) What priority should be given to improving the customer experience of Housing Services, and which were the most effective and efficient actions to achieve this?
- (3) How should limited financial resources be prioritised to support sustainable investment in each of the following:-
 - Capital spend – investment in existing stock;
 - New build programme; and
 - Revenue spend - including wider community priorities.
- (4) Should the Council consider products that were closer to the market such as Intermediate or Affordable Rent in order to generate additional income?
- (5) What was the Council's appetite for repaying or increasing its debt?

The discussion paper had been considered in detail at the recent meeting of the Community Scrutiny Committee and consultations had also been undertaken with the Tenant Services Management Board, the Tenants Forum and all staff members in the Housing and Communities Directorate.

Although a detailed summary of the key points and responses received was circulated with the report, the main conclusions which could be drawn from those responses were as follows:-

- The Council's core business should be social rented housing for the most vulnerable in our communities;
- The proposed new objectives were appropriate;
- Much could be done to improve the customer experience of the Housing Service;
- Subject to certain continuing commitments regarding repairs and maintenance service standards, on balance it would be acceptable to prioritise new build over some maintenance spend;
- However, understandably tenant groups would not want the standards in Taunton Deane's existing housing to fall, and it was felt that more could be done to make better use of the current repairs and maintenance spend in order to free up resources;
- There was an appetite to look at housing products that were closer to the market in order to generate additional income on new build/regeneration schemes; and
- There was an acceptance and agreement that our current approach to debt repayment would have to be revised, based on treasury management advice, to achieve a viable Business Plan and protect services.

Reported that a large scale stock condition survey of Taunton Deane owned housing was currently underway. The results of this were expected to be received by early April, and would 'feed in' to the overall financial position relating to the HRA Business Plan.

Following the completion of the survey, regular sessions and briefings were being planned with both Members and tenants culminating in recommendations being made to Full Council in July 2016 as to the approval of a revised Business Plan.

Resolved that:-

- (1) The report, particularly the key points and responses received to the recent consultation, be noted and supported;
- (2) The Areas for Discussion (1) and (4) be linked in such a way that any further income generated would be available to support the core business of the Housing Service; and
- (3) The provision of more new build/regeneration schemes also be supported.

(Councillor Williams left the meeting at 7 p.m. Councillor Mrs Herbert took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.)

15. **Community Asset Transfer Policy**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning details of the recent consultation completed in respect of the Council adopting a Community Asset Transfer Policy.

Implementation of the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy had commenced in July 2014.

The draft Policy was sent out for consultation in August / September 2014 to local Community Groups, Town / Parish Councils and libraries for comment. The result of the consultation came back with various concerns as follows:-

- a) The Policy was too long and complicated;
- b) It focused on transfers only by way of leasing out property;
- c) There was no indicative timetable for progress of a CAT application;
- d) It seemed to focus on the transfer of non-profitable assets and merely for community bodies to take on the cost of maintaining and running them;
- e) The Policy also appeared to have too much Council control with the Council being able to take back the asset if a use was found which could make it viable; and
- f) It was not in the spirit of the Localism Act.

Following on from this response, the decision was taken to comprehensively reassess the draft Policy to take into account the issues that had been raised. It was also decided to look at the CAT Policies already adopted by other Councils and establish what factors they had taken into consideration when drafting them.

The result of this was that the original draft Policy had been redrafted and consulted upon to a widened list of consultees which comprised:-

- o Councillors: County, Town and Parish as well as the Member of Parliament (approximately 106);
- o Education Organisations (approximately 2);
- o Faith Groups/Churches (approximately 43);
- o Internal Officers (approximately 15);
- o Partner Organisations (approximately 12); and
- o Voluntary and Community Organisations (approximately 165).

The consultation – which took place between 9 November 2015 and 15 January 2016 – had had a wide exposure, seeking to obtain representative views of the public.

The Council had received a total of 27 responses giving a response rate of 7.9%. Details of the responses were set out in the report.

The key themes of the consultation concerned:-

- (i) Whether the consultee believed that the Policy would deliver wider public benefits as part of a CAT process;
- (ii) Whether the consultee believed the Policy would achieve the Council's Corporate Aims and Values;
- (iii) Agreement as to the principles underlying the Policy which sought to involve local communities, to provide a pro-active asset management programme as well as giving clear transparency in decision making. Consultees were asked whether these principles would help the Council achieve a successful CAT Policy; and
- (iv) Acceptance of the application criteria set out in the CAT Policy.

Each of these key themes had attracted support in excess of 60%. Details of

various concerns expressed by some of the consultees were set out in the report. Although it was generally apparent that the majority of the consultees were supportive of the Council transferring assets, there was concern about continuing liabilities, lack of ongoing support from the Council but a continuing 'interest' in the land by the Council. Others believed that assets should be retained by the Council.

As a result of the consultation, a number of amendments had been made to the proposed CAT Policy.

Noted that the transfer of assets to community groups would have the potential to create opportunities for these groups to commission Deane DLO or other services to support them post transfer.

Reported that this matter had been considered by the Community Scrutiny Committee on 1 March 2016 where the CAT Policy was supported.

Resolved that Full Council be recommended to adopt the Community Asset Transfer Policy and the Initial Expression of Interest Form.

16. **Corporate Equality Objectives 2016-2019**

Considered report previously circulated, concerning the updating of the Corporate Equality Objectives for both Taunton Deane Borough Council and West Somerset Council.

The Equality Act 2010 covered the following protected characteristics:-

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and Civil Partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion and Belief
- Sex
- Sexual Orientation.

The Corporate Equality Objectives document outlined how the Council built equality into commissioning, procurement and delivering services and how the Council:-

- (a) Provided direction for the Council's Members, managers and employees with clear equality objectives;
- (b) Provided the basis for actions to be embedded within all service plans;
- (c) Document how the Council would meet its statutory public duties in regard of the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty; and
- (d) Utilised the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) process to ensure consideration of impact on groups with protected characteristics. These considerations were built into the design process of all changes to services and were fully considered by Members in the decision making process.

The Council took the approach that equalities should be mainstreamed within all service areas and should not be the sole responsibility of one officer. The following Corporate Equality Objectives reflected this approach specifically in the Council's role as a service provider, employer, purchaser of goods and services and elected community leader:-

- **Objective 1**: Councillors would fully consider the equality implications of all decisions they made.
- **Objective 2**: Those with protected characteristics felt empowered to contribute to the democratic process that affected them; their input to be used to inform the planning and delivery of services.
- **Objective 3**: Communities with protected characteristics were able to access services in a cost effective and appropriate way – for example through the provision of interpreting or translation services or signing for residents who were deaf or blind.
- **Objective 4**: Actions were taken to identify and reduce any inequalities faced by employees.

Copies of the proposed Corporate Equality Objectives 2016-2019 and Action Plan, the Interpreting and Translation Policy and the British Sign Language Charter for Somerset were submitted for the information of Members

The objectives would be implemented through a Corporate Equality Action Plan which would be regularly monitored to ensure equality risks were being assessed and that actions worked toward achieving the aims of the Corporate Equality Objectives.

Noted that Equality Impact Assessments would be monitored via six monthly 'spot checks' undertaken by the Housing and Community Team.

Further reported that consultation on the proposed Corporate Equality Objectives had been carried out with partners and other key stakeholders, including the countywide consultation event on 17 September 2015. Key findings from this consultation were detailed in the report.

The objectives aimed to improve the lives of the residents in Taunton Deane and would support the Council's legal requirements outlined in the Equality Act 2010 and the public sector equality duty 2011.

During the discussion of this item it was considered that additional training – whether through e-learning modules or through a more traditional means – should be provided for Members. Reference was also made to the Makaton form of Sign Language which should also be an option for those local residents who were deaf or hearing impaired who wished to communicate with the Council.

Resolved that the:-

- (a) Corporate Equality Objectives 2016–2019 and Action Plan;
- (b) Interpreting and Translation Policy; and

(c) British Sign Language Charter for Somerset;
all be adopted.

17. **Executive Forward Plan**

Submitted for information the Forward Plan of the Executive over the next few months.

Resolved that the Forward Plan be noted.

(The meeting ended at 7.31 p.m.)